



NEWS RELEASE

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Pickle Barrel

By Harry M. Davidson
CURATOR CAVALCADE OF WINGS

KIRTLAND AFB, N.M. — During World War II, nine air bases in the western United States were training bombardiers. There was a standing joke that a good bombardier could drop his bomb into a “pickle barrel” from 10,000 feet.

Every six weeks another class of bombardiers graduated from each of the nine bases. The best two graduates of each base were sent to a competition known as the “Bombardier Olympics”. During the 1942-1944 time frame, Kirtland Army Air Corps Base hosted the competition 10 times. KAACB won the contest three times. At least once during these competitions, Clovis, Carlsbad, Deming and Hobbs won the contest.

The prize for this competition was the Pickle Barrel Trophy. The item was a small whiskey keg painted with the wings of a bombardier and the inscriptions, “Bombardier Olympics” and “Army Air Corps Training Command”. Even though this was a traveling trophy, the name and date of each winner was not placed on the barrel. It is unknown whatever happened to the original barrel.

In 1992, the Bombardier’s Association held their annual convention in Albuquerque.

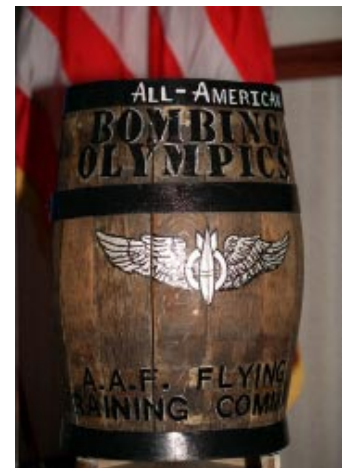
This year marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of the bombardier training program at Kirtland.

A clean wooden nail keg was obtained, a replacement end panel was installed, and the barrel was sanded, stained, varnished and marked to resemble the original.

Three weeks before the convention, the first replica was stolen from the Environmental Management offices.

A quick search turned up a real authentic whiskey barrel. A renovation project re-created the second replica. The replica trophy was presented to the base commander as part of the Bombardiers’ Reunion May 28, 1992.

During an extended period of time between the retirement of one historian and the arrival of the replacement, the trophy was unaccounted for (AWOL). The previous historian had moved the trophy to the Phillips Laboratory Historian’s Office for safe keeping.



In May 1996, the trophy was located, and after a repaint job was fit for public display. The trophy is available for viewing at the 377th Air Base Wing History Office.

During the 1992 Bombardier's Reunion, two other items were contributed to Kirtland Air Force Base. The Bombardiers Association donated a bronze plaque to the memory of those who lost their lives in World War II. The plaque is on display at Hardin Field just north of the flag pole.

The Eighth Air Force Association, Albuquerque Chapter, donated a painting showing a group of B-24 Liberators climbing out over the white cliffs of Dover enroute to a bombing raid in occupied Europe. For several years this painting has been displayed in the commander's office.

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